

104 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S
HISTORY

The miners from their caverns reechoed the
song with a
variation,

" Then twenty thousand underground will
know the
reason why/* '

' This fact/ he says In a footnote, ' was
communicated to
me in the most obliging manner by the
Reverend R. S.
Hawker of Morenstow In Cornwall/ '

Unluckily, the drawback is that It is quite
uncertain
whether this tradition is really genuine.
Hawker was
given to Inventing Cornish traditions and
fictitious his-
torical documents : he wrote a ballad on
Trelawney of
which this refrain forms part. There is also
a certain
doubt whether, If the refrain is really genuine,
it does not
refer to a different Trelawney and a
different time. This
is an example of the traps into which the
historian is
liable to fall when he attempts to rely on
tradition.

Another pitfall is the uncertain and
variable character
of the evidence afforded by ballads and the
fugitive verses
of a particular period as to the character and
conduct of
public personages. It is necessary to make
many reserva-
tions and distinctions. For certain purposes
ballads and
even lampoons are useful. They attest a belief
or a feeling
but they do not prove a fact. They enable
Macaulay to
show how much Jeffreys was hated in 1689,²
why Danby
was so unpopular with the Whigs in 1690*

and why
Sherlock was a mark for general ridicule in
1691.* But
they supply no proof of the truth of the
charges made
against these personages, and that they were
believed at
the time Is no sufficient reason for accepting
them. Fur-
thermore it is extremely important to
distinguish between

¹II, 1018, n. 2 (viii).

² III, 1210 (x).

³IV, 1958-9, ft- (xvi).

* IV, 2018, n. (xvii).